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Benefit of the Monument Fund for the Dead Sailors of the

>> Inited States Battle-Ship "Maine."

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Thursday, March 24th, 1898.

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HISTORY OF THE MAINE.

HEN the noble battleship Maine was blown up in Havana harbor, entailing the loss of 251 of her crew and two of her officers, the most appalling tragedy of the present generation was enacted. The disaster occurred at 9.40 o'clock on the night of Tuesday, February 15th, 1897. The explosion, which hurled into eternity so many brave Blue Jackets and destroyed beyond redemption, one of the finest war vessels in the American fleet, shook the city of Havana to its foundations, illuminating the harbor and striking terror to all within sight and hearing.

The Maine was in Cuban waters on a visit of courtesy. Had she departed from Havana at the time originally intended, the nation to-day would probably not be in mourning for the loss of her heroic defenders. On the day set for her departure from Cuban waters, the Maine's commander, the gallant Captain Sigsbee, received orders from the Navy Department to remain in the harbor of Havana until further instructions were forwarded to him. It was less than a week after this that the proud warship was blown up—whether by design or by acci-

dent is yet to be determined.

Captain Sigsbee's first despatch to the Navy Department, transmitting information of the catastrophe, advised that public opinion be suspended until the cause of the explosion could be definitely ascertained. His view of the disaster was taken by President McKinley and Secretary of the Navy Long, the latter venturing the opinion that the destruction of the Maine was due to accident, and, in turn suggesting the suspension of public judgment. While adopting these measures of caution, the Administration did not delay in making arrangements for a thorough investigation as to the causes leading to the horror. A peculiar phase of the great tragedy was the fact that Secretary of the Navy Long and Assistant Secretary Roosevelt were at total variance regarding the calamity. Secretary Roosevelt contended that all indications pointed to treachery; and for several days the two ranking officials of the Navy Department broke lances with each other.

On the day following the catastrophe Secretary Long appointed a Court of Inquiry to investigate the disaster. The Court was composed of the following officers: Captain Wm. T. Sampson, Senior Captain of the Navy, commanding the Iowa; Captain French E. Chadwick, commanding officer of the New York, and for many years Chief of the Naval Equipment Bureau; Lieutenant-Commander William P. Potter,

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Executive Officer of the New York; Lieutenant Commander Adolph Marix, Executive Officer of the Vermont. Marix was made Judge Advocate of the Court.

In the Senate, on Thursday, February 17th, Mr. Allen (Populist

of Nebraska) offered a resolution couched in these terms:

"Resolved, that the Committee on Naval Affairs is directed to make immediate and thorough inquiry into the cause of the destruction of the battleship Maine in the harbor of Havana, and to report the result of the same to the Senate."

Senator Hale, Chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs, suggested that, as the executive branch of the government had already

taken the required action, the resolution was unnecessary.

The Court of Inquiry was ordered to Havana immediately, and was given unlimited authority. Secretary Long, on Saturday, February 19th, telegraphed Admiral Sicard to expedite the work of the Court as much as possible. This was done because as time elapsed the impression began to prevail that Spain was in some way responsible for the destruction of the Maine. In view of this fact, any delay on the part of the Court of Inquiry would arouse criticism, which the De-

partment desired to avoid.

The war feeling, which had been steadily gaining ground, was considerably accentuated by Senator Wm. E. Mason's speech in the Senate on Friday, February 18th. Mr. Mason offered a substitute for the Allen resolution, which had been laid over. The amendment provided for the prompt investigation of the Maine disaster by a joint committee of Congress. On the floor, Mr. Mason vigorously condemned Spain, and declared that the American people wanted to know at once how the Maine was blown up. Action was deferred until the following Monday, February 21st, when, instead of Mr. Mason's substitute, the Allen resolution was agreed to without objection.

On this day, also, the Senate acepted the House resolution appro-

priating \$200,000 for the raising of the wrecked battleship.

The Administration first began to display the apprehension which it had previously carefully concealed on Saturday, February 19th. Although the Court of Inquiry had not yet commenced its investigation, the messages received from Captain Sigsbee were of a grave tenor, and the Government officials began to see the necessity of preparing for an emergency. The President and the Cabinet continued to assume that the sad affair was an accident; but they, on the day named, faintly entertained the belief (which Senator Wolcott voiced in his speech against Senator Mason's substitute resolution) that "the war clouds were gathering, and nothing but a miracle of diplomacy could avert conflict."

On this day were noted the first warlike moves—little in themselves, but demonstrating that the Administration feared the worst in the report of the Court of Inquiry. Spain had made a request that Spanish authorities be permitted to participate in the inquiry concerning the disaster. This was denied by Secretary Long, who decided that the American investigation should be independent.



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No doubt the information received on the day previous, that the Maine's forward magazine did not explode (as was at first supposed), had much to do with the Secretary's refusal to allow Spain to take any part in the examination of the sunken ship. American divers had been at work searching for the bodies of the dead sailors, and, although they did not at first go down in the sunken vessel, it is fair to assume that they made discoveries which were of grave import to the United States Government. Their reports were, of course, unofficial; and for that reason the Administration was compelled to act

with extreme caution regarding them.

Whether or not the Spanish authorities at Havana were aware of the Secretary's refusal to accede to their demand when they prevented the American divers from continuing their work, is not known. The Spanish appointed a technical commission (with Lieutenant Pedro Peral at the head) to investigate the disaster. Captain Sigsbee had arranged to begin a search for the bodies of Lieutenant Jenkins and Engineer Merritt, but the Spanish sentinels informed the American divers that they could not go down unless accompanied by Spanish divers. After a long and animated conference among Captain Sigsbee, Consul-General Lee and General Blanco, the two former were advised that they might use their divers where and how they

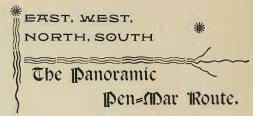
pleased.

At this time the United States Government began to look to its coast defenses. Two days previously to the arrival of the Court of Inquiry at Havana, which occurred on Monday, February 21st. orders for ammunition were sent secretly to various factories, and work on the heavy ordnance in course of construction was ordered pushed with the utmost expediency. The greatest activity was immediately noticed at all the navy yards and seacoast fortifications. From every part of the country came reports of guns and mortars being hurried to the coasts, and of an increase in the force to man the batteries. In addition to all these obvious preparations for war, the Congress passed a bill authorizing two additional regiments of artillery, which was signed by the President.

The Court of Inquiry lost no time in beginning its investigation. Under its rules all evidence discovered by the Board was kept secret, to be presented in bulk, with the Court's findings, to the Secretary of the Navy at the conclusion of the investigation.

The meeting of the Court began shortly after noon on Monday, February 21st. Spain was not allowed any official part in the proceedings; but its representatives (in the persons of Captain Peral and his secretary, Lieutenant Salas, of the Spanish Navy) were present by invitation. The Court continued its investigation at Havana until Friday, February 25th, when the members proceeded to Key West, Fla., to take the testimony of the wounded sailors who had been conveyed to the hospital there. At the conclusion of its work in Key West, the Court returned to Havana for a few days, afterward returning to Key West and submitted a report to the President, which will be personally delivered by one of the members of the Court of Inquiry, and is anxiously awaited by the American public.

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The destruction of the Maine was well nigh complete. Her back was broken by the explosion, and her keel was found fractured, bent and twisted, twenty-nine feet above its original resting place. This would indicate that the damage was due to an extraneous agency. When this information was conveyed to the President and Cabinet, it became the basis of increased activity in the preparations for an emergency. Warships were mobilized; extra supplies and ammunition were purchased, and agents of this Government were instructed to ascertain what cruisers foreign powers were building.

These proceedings were considered necessary to meet the contingency of war, if that should result from the work of the Court of Inquiry. President McKinley, however, had under consideration another line of action. Admitting that the Maine was blown up from the outside, he and his advisers discussed the subject of selecting the policy which would be for the best interests and the dignity of the nation. The all-important question was as to whether the destruction of the Maine was an act of war. The principal fact had been determined, and the next matter of importance was the fixing of the re-

sponsibility.

The battleship Maine, although rated in the second-class, was regarded as one of the best vessels of the new navy. She was built at the Brooklyn navy yard, being completed in the summer of 1895. In 1887, Congress appropriated \$2,500,000 to defray the cost of the ship's construction, and her keel was laid the following year. All the work on the vessel was done in the Brooklyn navy yard, with the exception of the engines and the armor plate, the latter being furnished by the Carnegie Company. She made a successful trial trip on Long Island Sound in October, 1894, and was credited with a speed of 18.37 knots an hour, with over 18 feet draft. Later, on her official trip, she attained a speed greater than the contract figure, 17 knots, and frequently afterward made nearly 18 knots.

The official dimensions of the Maine, when she went into com-

mission, were as follows:

Length on the water line, 318 feet; breadth, 57 feet; mean draft,

10 feet 6 inches; displacement, 6648 tons.

The engines, four in number, were built by the Quintard Iron Works of New York City, weighed some 890 tons, and were of the twin-screw vertical triple-expansion type. The cylinders were 35½, 57 and 88 inches in diameter, and had a stroke of 36 inches. The indicated horsepower of the engines was 9000; and the engines took two and one-half years to build. Her total coal capacity was 846 tons. The main battery consisted of four 10-inch and six 6-inch breech-loading rifles. The secondary battery contained eight 6-pound rapid firers, eight 1-pound rapid firers, and four Gatling guns. On the main deck there were two turrets—one placed aft on the starboard side. These turrets were both mounted on barbettes running down to the protective deck. The vessel was heavily protected from the guns of an enemy by side armor, 12 inches thick. This armor was placed on both sides of the vessel, and was about 200 feet long and

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7 feet broad. This protected the engines, boilers, magazines—in fact, all the vulnerable parts of the ship. The turrets were protected by 8-inch armor, and the barbettes had plates 12 inches thick. There were five decks—the platform deck, the protective, the berth, the main, and the superstructure. The protective deck was guarded by means of

2-inch plate armor.

The guns were mounted as follows: Two of the 10-inch guns were placed in each turret, where they were so mounted that they could be trained to fire within an arc of 288 degrees. Four of the six 6-inch guns were mounted on the main deck, two in the bow and two in the stern. The other two were mounted on the middle of the superstructure deck, one to port and one to starboard. The eight 6pounders were divided up with six on the main deck and two on the bridge. Six of the eight 1-pounders were mounted on the main deck and one in the fighting top on each mast. Of the four Gatlings, two were mounted on the superstructure deck, and one in each fighting top. On her superstructure deck she had altogether thirteen boats. Of these, two were torpedo boats, two were steam launches, and the balance were ordinary barges and gigs. The two torpedo boats, however, were an important addition to her armament, and deserve special consideration. They weighed about 29,000 pounds each, were 62 feet 6 inches long and had 9 feet 3 inch beam. They had a speed of about twenty knots per hour.

Each boat was driven by a quadruple expansion engine, and carried torpedo tubes in its bow. Although, outside their torpedoes, they were not intended as vessels of offence, each of them carried a 1-pound swivel aft, which could be used with great effect in case an attempt was made to capture them by boats. Although their weight ran up to so high a figure, it was mainly due to the engines and boilers, which were of the finest make and were needed for the development of the high speed necessary to their usefulness. The inside shell of these boats was only 3-32 of an inch thick and so thin that a ball from an ordinary pistol would have no difficulty in piercing the sides. In action, a crew to run one of these boats would consist of five men; an officer in charge, an engineer, fireman and two men to launch the torpedoes. It is generally conceded by legal experts that these two boats were even more to be feared than the Maine's heaviest guns.

The Maine was ordered from Dry Tortugas to Havana on January 23d. The action was regarded with suspicion; but Secretary Long explained that the order had no special significance—that the Government intended to renew its friendly visits to the Cuban capital. When the battleship arrived in Havana harbor she saluted the Spanish flag and was honored in the customary manner.

It was the intention of the Navy Department to send the Maine to New Orleans during the Mardi Gras festival; but the arrangement

was abandoned.

The career of the Maine was a most unfortunate one. In August, 1896, she bent ten plates along her port keel by tripping her anchor while at Key West, and drifting on a reef. In February, 1897, a 1-pound cartridge exploded during target practice, three men being

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seriously injured thereby. In July, 1897, in order to avoid running down a heavily-loaded excursion boat, she was rammed into an East river pier by her captain. She sustained no serious damage this time, however.

In February of last year Admiral Bunce made this report to Assistant Secretary McAdoo, after his experience with his squadron off

Cape Hatters in the gale of February 5th and 6th:

"The Maine's behavior at sea in heavy weather is bad. Her pitching and rolling are excessive, and is attributed to faulty design in placing too much heavy weight at her extremities, which was increased by attempting to correct another error when she was commissioned. Her battery cannot be used as designed without destruction of boats and other fittings, and in some instances loss of life, if the crews remain at their guns. For this reason there has been no attempt to make such use of the guns as is contemplated in the design of the ship and arrangement of her batteries."



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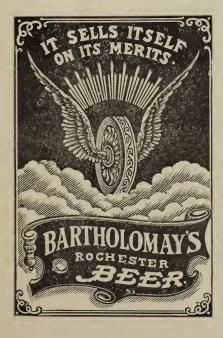


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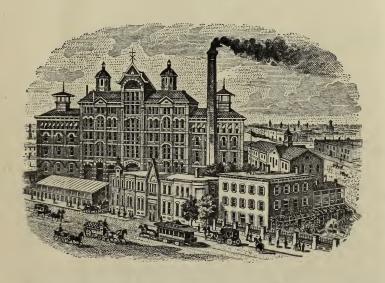
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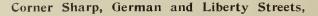
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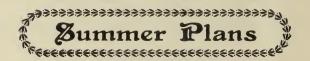
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